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Romney Speaks Out

Gov. George Romney of Michigan spoke out on foreign policy this week in a speech before the Cleveland chapter of the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

It was his strongest statement to date on foreign policy and it was no sugar-coated effort to ignore the decline of the American "image" abroad.

Said Romney:

"Most nations, even including our allies, no longer consider us dedicated to peace—what a pity and costly misfortune. But it is not too late, we still have time to learn from our mistakes.

"We must neither repeat nor compound the errors of the past. If we can learn in time, we can avoid other Viet Nams and even find in Viet Nam itself an honorable solution which will put the people of that unhappy country in control of their own destinies — without a wider war — and hopefully with a short one."

Romney said a praiseworthy but misguided desire to help emerging nations after the era of colonization put the "American presence" in all parts of the world.

"But too often," he added, "American arms shored up tottering and unpopular regimes. Too often, American aid dollars stuck to the fingers of corrupt, tyrannical rulers. Too often, American business rushed in to dominate local markets."

The Michigan governor went on to say that the United States "unwittingly, unintentionally . . . has too largely become in the eyes of the world the practical successor of 19th century white colonialism. Our motives were good but we fell into the ancient trap of rich and powerful men and nations. We relied too heavily on the material fruits of our progress."

Romney's words are conducive to some soul-searching on the part of Americans. We know he is right about our motives being good. We have been generous too, too generous, many believe, because we have handed out sums abroad while going deeper into debt at home.

Meanwhile, the CIA and the State Department have scarcely demonstrated outstanding skill in pursuance of their duties. Our public relations, as Governor Romney said, are not the best.

If we sense public opinion correctly, it is that Americans want to avoid any future commitments that will further obligate us to defend far-flung territory not our own. It will be recalled that U.S. Sen. Stuart Symington of Missouri, on his return from Europe last month, said flatly that under present policies we are over-committed now.

It's more than just a diplomatic and military problem. The plain truth is that we simply can't be all things to all nations. We can't afford it and we also must remember that we are not the only country in the world with pride in its heritage.